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Kansas managing wheat disease

Manhattan, Kansas – Weather conditions in Kansas have been ideal this year for the development of wheat disease. The same is true all across wheat country with most areas experiencing two to three years of drought followed by plentiful rainfall this spring. Stripe rust is a common wheat disease being managed through the middle of the United States from Texas to North Dakota. It has been widely noted in Kansas wheat fields. Farmers are also encouraged to scout for vomitoxin or Fusarium head blight, particularly in southeast Kansas. Weather conditions have also been ideal for flag smut, a fungus found in the United States, but not known in Kansas since the 1930s.

During the week of May 6, 2015, wheat flag smut (*Urocystis tritici*) was initially detected in a field demonstration plot in Rooks County and confirmed by laboratory result during regular and on-going disease survey work. KSU and KDA have jointly conducted field surveys since 1976 and KDA is working closely with KSU Plant Pathology and USDA APHIS PPQ to do additional disease surveys to determine the severity and breadth of the outbreak. Of the 64 fields surveyed the week of June 1, only two presumptive positive tests have been detected.

More information about the spread of the disease will be available late next week.

“Flag smut presents no human or animal health concern, has no impact on grain quality and is expected to move through the normal supply chain. It can have a negative impact on wheat yield, the severity of which is determined by the infestation level of the field” said Jeff Vogel, KDA Plant Protection and Weed Control program manager. Yield loss from flag smut is anticipated to be less than that caused by the stripe rust present this year.

Flag smut spores can live in the soil and survive in wheat relative plant species allowing the disease to potentially maintain a low-level, undetected presence in the state. The life cycle of the disease can be broken by planting seed treated with one of several available fungicides.

KDA Plant Protection and Weed Control will work with K-State Research and Extension and the Kansas wheat industry to provide best management practices for farmers to prevent flag smut in the coming crop year including planting treated seed. The Kansas Department of Agriculture’s mission includes serving farmers and protecting plant health in order to help ensure the continued strong contribution of agriculture to the state’s economy.

For additional information on wheat diseases in Kansas, check www.agriculture.ks.gov/ppws, <http://www.ksre.ksu.edu/wheatpage/> or your local extension office and farm organizations including Kansas Wheat or Kansas Farm Bureau.